

THE POLICY OF THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION TOWARD CUBA: Reply Made by the President (Kennedy) to a Question Asked at the Conclusion of an Address Before the Florida Chamber of Commerce, Tampa, Fla., November 18, 1963^{aa}

When this administration took office, Castro, of course, was in control of Cuba, and the United States has made efforts, along with

^{aa} The reply printed here is taken from p. 817 of the Department of State Bulletin, Nov. 25, 1963 (reprint of Department of State press release No. 572).

^{aa} The Secretary was referring to the seizure of 19 Cuban refugees from a British islet and their return to Cuba by a Cuban air and naval force on Aug. 13, 1963; *The New York Times*, Aug. 16, 1963.

^{aa} The reply printed here is taken from p. 867 of *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963*.

other countries of the Organization of American States, to provide for a return to democratic government in Cuba. Those efforts, of course, have not been successful. We have, however, in association with other countries of this hemisphere, joined together in an attempt to isolate the virus of communism, and in that regard we have achieved some measure of success. Only five countries in this hemisphere now recognize Cuba.⁵⁹ In 1959, the trade of the free world with Cuba was about \$1,300 million. Now, in 1963 there has been an 80 percent reduction in that trade.

There has been, for example, in the first 10 months of 1963, a 10 percent reduction, as compared to 1962, of the number of free registry free world registered ships. And now with the recent order put out by the Greek Government, which, with British traders, were the greatest free world traders with Cuba, we are going to find a further sharp reduction. In addition, while there is a good deal of discontent and turmoil and danger in Latin America, I do not think that there is any doubt that Fidel Castro, as a symbol of revolt in this hemisphere, has faded badly. Every survey, every report, I think every newspaper man, every publisher, would agree that because Mr. Castro has embraced the Soviet Union and made Cuba its satellite, that the appeal that he had in the late fifties and early sixties as a national revolutionary has been so badly damaged and scarred that as a symbol, his torch is flickering. We have not been successful in removing Mr. Castro. We should realize that that task is one which involves not only the security of the United States, but other countries. It involves possibilities of war. It involves danger to people as far away as West Berlin, Germany, countries which border upon the Soviet Union, the Middle East, all the countries that are linked to us in alliance. The Soviet Union is so intimately linked with Cuba.

So we have attempted to isolate Cuba in the hope that some day Cuba will be free and that the pressures of life in Cuba will make more obvious to people around this hemisphere that communism does not offer a shortcut to economic well-being. The gross national product of Cuba is 25 percent below what it was in 1958. The Soviet Union today is giving \$450 million worth of assistance every year to Cuba. They are pouring into Cuba—and this should be a source of concern to us, because Latin America is still before us, and the challenges of Latin America—they are giving as much aid to Cuba alone as they are giving to all of Latin America. That is not a statistic in which I take particular pride, but it does indicate how heavy is their commitment and how successful so far has been their support.

Some Soviet troops still remain, not as armed units. There has been a substantial withdrawal, but there is a good deal of unfinished business in Cuba.

In answer to your question, Mr. Castro still is in control in Cuba, and still remains a major danger to the United States.

⁵⁹ Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay.